

BALEAP Conference 2025

“They are the future us”

Enhancing the International Student Experience through Alumni Interviews



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The Key Problem



Coneyworth (2019)

One year Masters

One year to adapt to a new academic culture

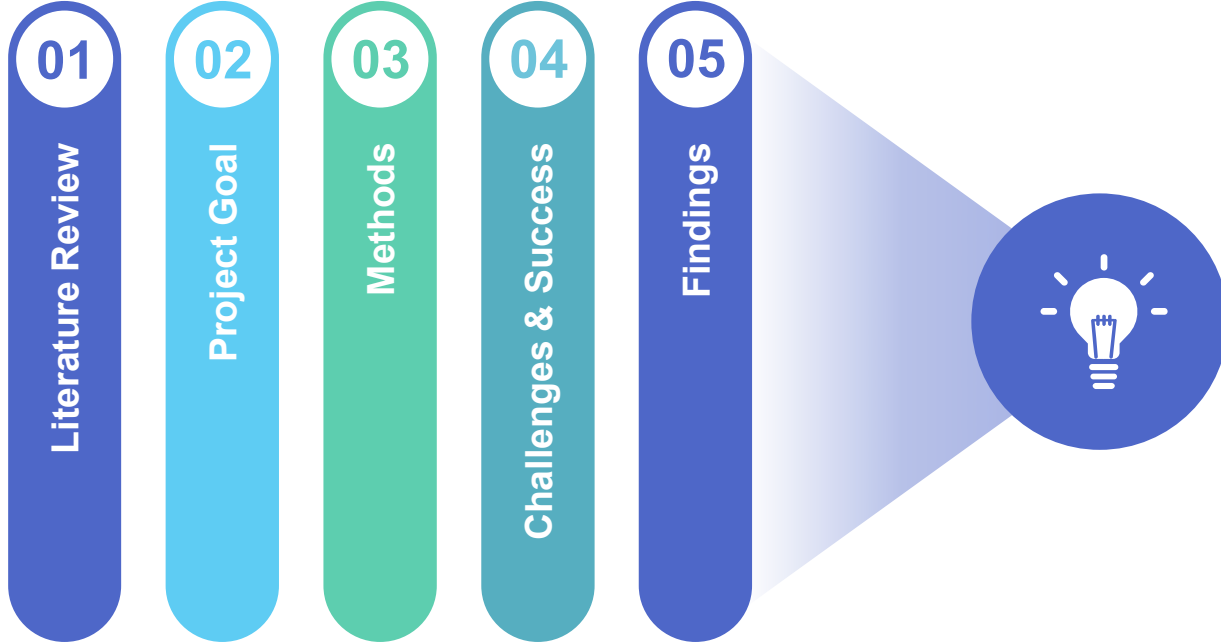
Bamber et al. (2017)

EAP makes a valuable contribution

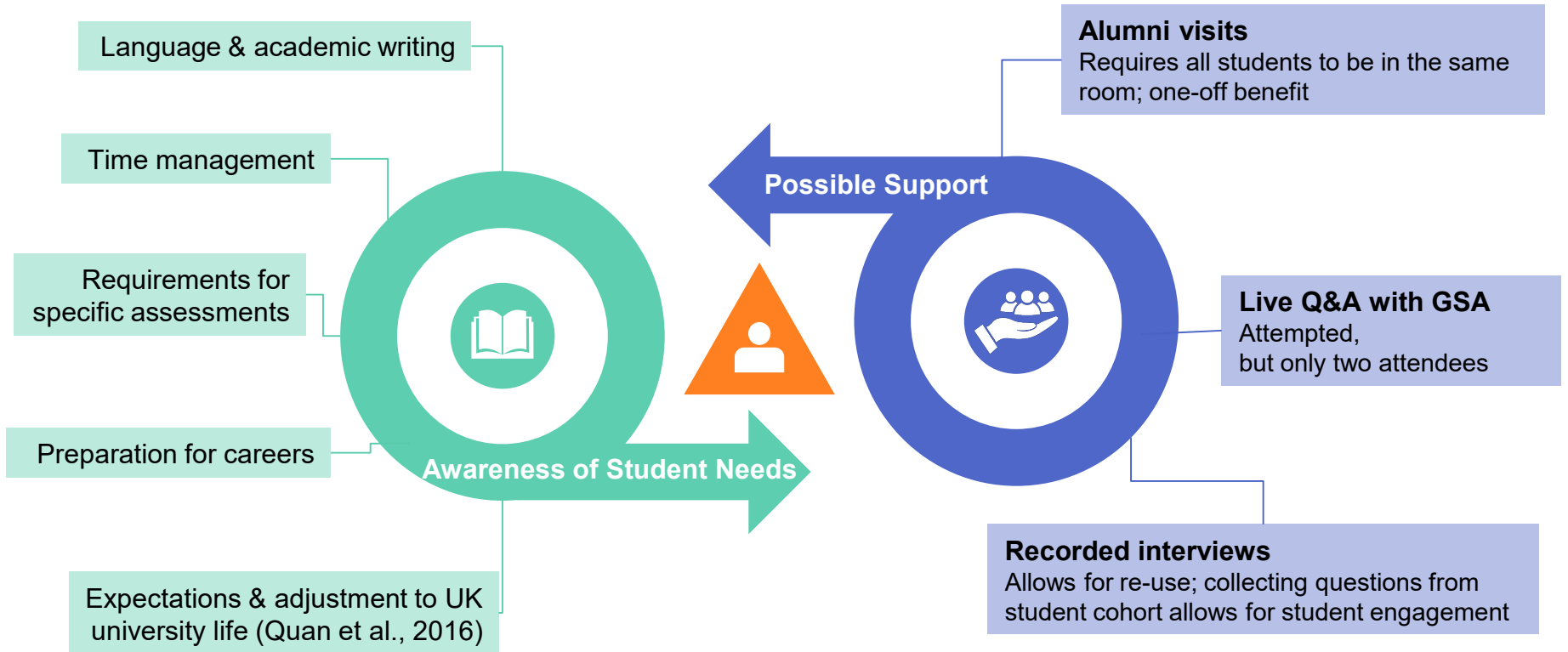
But students still feel **disoriented** and **unsure of requirements and best practice**

How can we share the **knowledge and experiences of previous cohorts** with our current students?

Contents



Background



Previous Research

Breaking the cohort barrier

Frith et al. (2022)

Video guidance for former students

Lamont (2024)

Internship for MA students as facilitators in a pre-sessional classroom

Larsson et al. (2021)

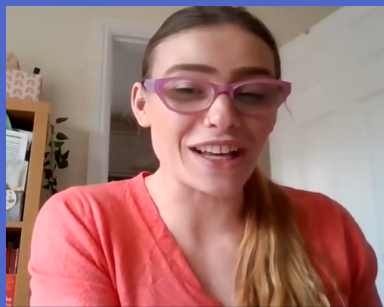
Interviews with alumni, focusing on applying classroom theory to business practice

Menzies et al. (2015);
Ragavan (2013)

Peer mentoring programmes with international students

There is room for a more detailed, in-depth discussion with selected successful students about their experiences.

Project Goals



Support current students by providing **first-hand accounts** of previous students' **challenges** and **how they overcame them**

Allow past students to act as **mentors and guides**

Provide a **useful learning resource** for future students

Methods

Interview Creation

Six students

Hired to **undertake the project**

Questions

They **sourced questions from the student community** and created a list of questions to ask the alumni

Interviews

They **conducted the interviews** and asked follow-up questions

Usage and Analysis

Video Interviews

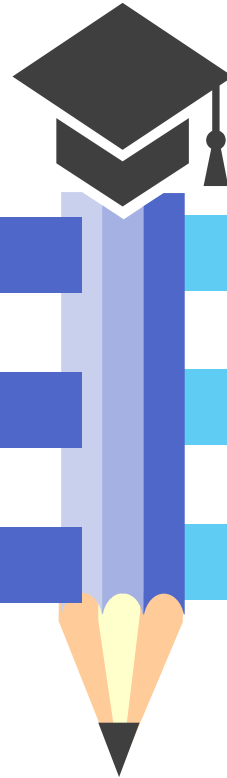
Shown in timetabled academic skills class

Students

Encouraged to select most useful sections & completed form at the end of the session (opt-outs permitted)

Analysis

Data analysed thematically



Challenges

01

University Employee Policies

Students struggled with university hiring and employee policies - particularly an issue with international students

02

Limited time to use funding

03

Recruitment

Recruiting large numbers of alumni was a challenge - planned 6 interviews reduced to 4.

Successes

01

Student Performance

Students performed well as interviewers and asked pertinent questions

02

Useful findings around careers & job hunting

03

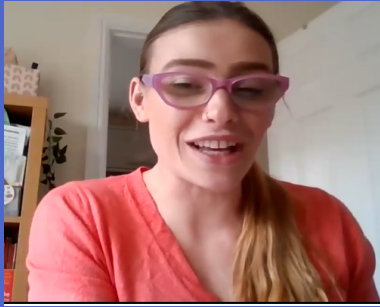
Wide variety of answers & advice for future students

04

Reusable Material

Will be useful as teaching materials in the future

Findings



Student evaluation of the session



Students' thoughts about the differences between learning from students and lecturers



Questions students would like to ask alumni

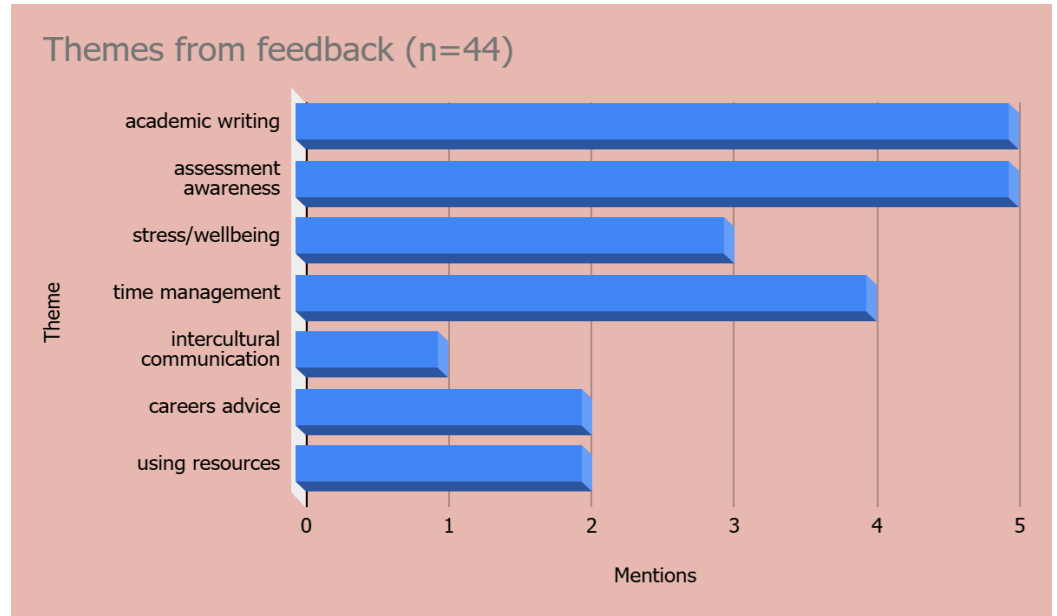
Findings

Student evaluation of the session

98% found it “helpful”
or “very helpful”

Key themes emerged:

- Academic writing
- Assessment awareness
- Stress/wellbeing
- Time management



Findings

Student evaluation of the session



*The biggest help of this session is that I learned how to do **time management**. These time management methods have inspired me a lot.*

*I think that the interviews were really useful but I found the **discussion around the interviews** to be even more beneficial. It is useful to know what **previous successful students have done** so that I can take similar actions.*

*They've been through the program, so they know what works and what doesn't. Their advice is based on **actual experience, not just theory**. They can also tell me how the program helped them in their career, what skills are most valuable, and how to **make the most of opportunities** like internships or networking.*

Findings

Differences between learning from students and lecturers



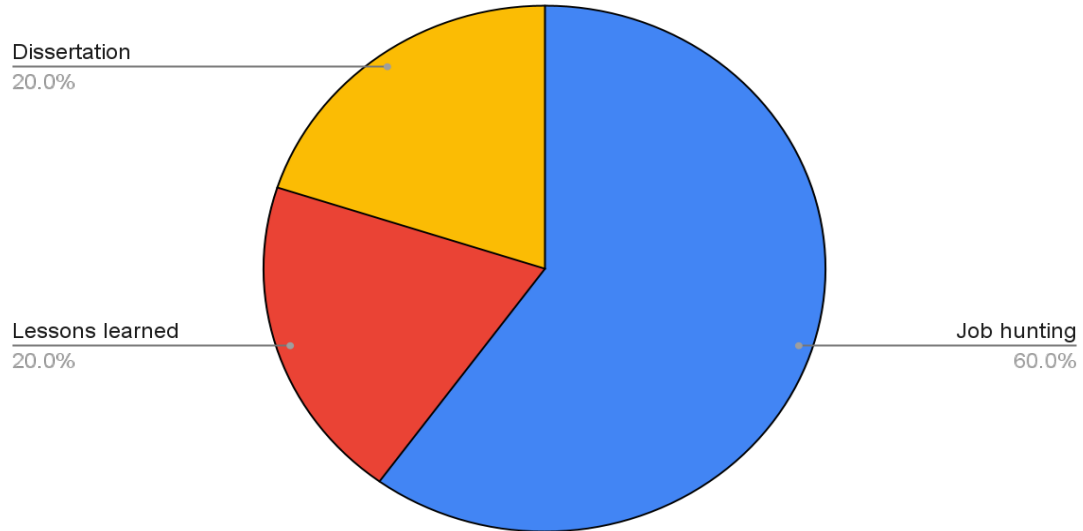
*Former students can provide practical insights into how the theories and concepts taught in class can be applied in **real-life situations**. They share personal experiences and strategies for overcoming challenges, which can make the learning more relatable and motivating. In contrast, teachers and academics tend to focus more on theoretical knowledge and structured learning. Both types of learning are valuable, but **former students bring a unique, practical viewpoint that complements academic teachings***

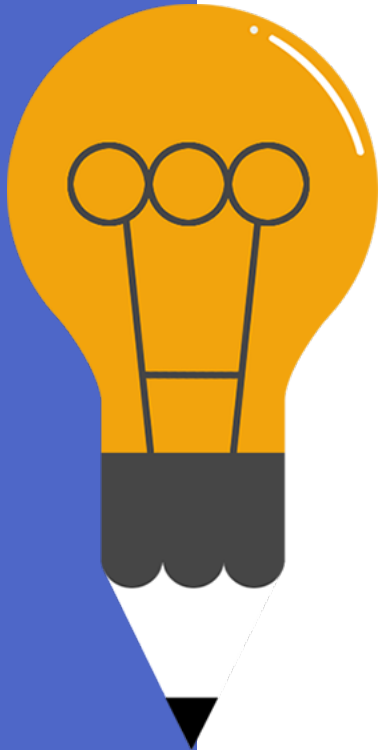
They are the future us, not just someone on the slides or textbook.

Findings

If you could meet another former student from your course, what would you ask them?

Themes from feedback (n=44)





Conclusion

01

Clear benefits for students in terms of academic skills, awareness of how to do well in assessments, and wellbeing.

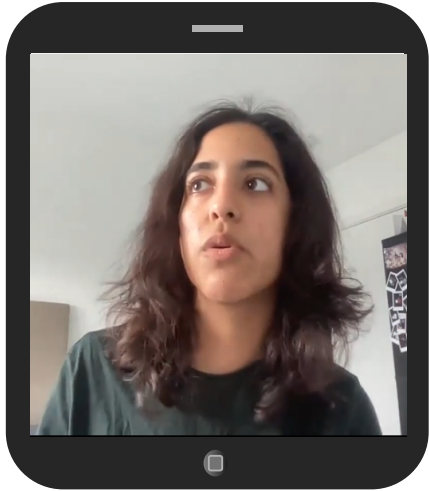
02

Provided a useful insight into the value of learning from former students and spurred strong class discussions.

03

Students expressed clear interest in greater careers guidance and support.

Some Clips



Rimsha, an MSc in Psychology of Education graduate, offers her advice for future students.



Helen, an MA Education graduate and current PhD student, discusses what she would do differently if she could do the course again.

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